

***Family Farmers, Ranchers, Conservation, Nutrition Programs Included***

**WASHINGTON, DC**-Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) today plans to vote in the full House of Representatives for a new bipartisan Farm Bill which will aid Texas' rural economy through a combination of new and renewed programs for family farmers and ranchers, conservation, nutrition, rural and energy development programs, among others. Officially titled the *Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act* (H.R. 2419), the legislation is expected to pass by a large bipartisan margin this evening.

"Our rural communities have been concerned about the right things coming from the latest Farm Bill and I think we've come out with something that will directly address these concerns as our economy continues to struggle," said Rodriguez. "This Farm Bill addresses many of the needs of rural communities, family farmers and ranchers, those concerned with continued conservation, and the expansion of nutrition programs for many of our most vulnerable citizens including children and seniors."

Struggling farmers will receive much-needed aid from the legislation. The Farm Bill reforms disaster assistance to make it a permanent, paid for program for farmers with crops stricken by natural disasters such as drought and flood. America's farmers feed our nation and the world, and this bill recognizes their great contribution.

To encourage conservation efforts for sportsmen and others who care about our environment, the Farm Bill boosts conservation programs that reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water and air quality, increase wildlife habitat and reduce damage caused by floods and other natural disasters by \$7.9 million.

Nearly three-fourths of the Farm Bill will support nutrition programs that help 38 million American families afford healthy food. The bill also provides much-needed support to emergency feeding organizations and helps schools provide healthy snacks to students, with \$1 billion for free fresh fruits and vegetables.

Below are some of the specifics of programs that will help in the area:

## **Rural Economic Development Programs**

### **Addresses health care, emergency, and first responder needs of rural areas**

- Authorizes the Rural Firefighters and Emergency Medical Service Assistance Program to provide improved emergency medical services in rural areas
- Expands 9-1-1 access in rural areas by making telephone loans to public entities for facilities and equipment
- Provides grants for weather radio transmitters to increase coverage of rural areas by the emergency weather broadcast system

### **Establishes three regional Commissions to encourage economic development**

- The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission
- The Southwest Border Regional Commission
- The Northern Border Regional Commission

**Authorizes \$30 million per year that the Commissions will use to provide grants for basic infrastructure and business development in the region to improve economically distressed and underdeveloped areas**

### **Renews critical rural infrastructure**

- Renews Water and Waste Disposal Grants and Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider

Programs to help reduce water and waste disposal operating costs for rural areas and towns

- Renews the Emergency and Imminent Community Water Assistance Grant Program to provide technical assistance to communities that have had a significant decline in quantity or quality of drinking water
- Provides grants to qualified non-profit organizations for the construction of household water well systems in low-income areas

### **Makes critical investments in our rural communities**

- Renews successful programs that provide vital infrastructure needs to underserved areas
- Adds innovative projects to promote economic development in the technology-driven 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- Provides \$120 million for critical water and wastewater projects in rural areas

### **Connects rural America**

- Improves access to broadband telecommunications services in rural areas with a greater focus on the rural communities of greatest need
- Extends and makes major changes to the broadband program to focus loans on underserved rural areas

### **Expands opportunities for locally grown and small producers**

- Provides \$15 million for the Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant program, which offers planning and working capital for marketing value-added products
- Creates a 10% set-aside for strategic marketing alliances between small to mid-sized farms and ranches and other supply chain partners

### **Attracting new businesses, improving access to technology, and capturing new markets**

- Includes \$15 million for a new Rural Entrepreneur and Microenterprise Assistance Program that will provide technical and financial assistance to micro-enterprises and small businesses in rural areas with fewer than 10 employees
- Extends Rural Business Opportunity Grants for job training in rural areas
- Extends Rural Cooperative Development Grants, a competitive program that establishes and operates centers for rural cooperative development
- Extends the Agriculture Innovation Center Demonstration Program, which provides technical assistance, outreach, and business and marketing planning to increase the viability, growth, and sustainability of value-added agricultural businesses
- Sets aside funds in the Business and Industry Program for loans and loan guarantees for rural food enterprise entrepreneurs that process and distribute food locally and regionally

### **Commodity and Ag Programs**

#### **Extends the strong safety net for farmers**

- Maintains programs authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill with minor changes
- Preserves the non-recourse marketing loan program, a fundamental piece of the farm safety net
- Continues the price-based counter-cyclical program, which provides assistance when prices decline

**Offers producers the option of enrolling in a new revenue-based counter-cyclical program**

- Creates the new Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) program beginning in crop year 2009
- ACRE is a state-based revenue guarantee for participants based on the 5-year state average yield and the 2-year national average price
- ACRE provides producers with payments for a commodity when the actual state revenue for the commodity is less than the revenue guarantee

**Helps fruit and vegetable producers address food safety, pest and disease management issues**

- Provides \$377 million for pest and disease detection and control
- Directs USDA to develop assessments and establish priorities to combat pest and disease threats
- Provides money and outlines a plan for new programs of joint action between Federal and State governments to provide for early detection and surveillance of plant pests and diseases
- Establishes proactive, cooperative, audit-based certification systems between USDA, States, and growers to address plant pest infestations
- Research title (Title VII) provision offers fruit and vegetable producers a new tool for cooperating in efforts to fight food-borne illness through a \$23 million set-aside in the specialty crop research initiative for research on food safety hazards

**Reforms program eligibility criteria and strengthens payment limitations**

- Imposes a cap on average adjusted gross income (AGI) for eligibility to receive farm program payments
- Puts a hard cap on non-farm income at \$500,000
- Applies a cap on farm income at \$750,000, after which a producer will no longer be eligible for direct payments
- Establishes the total payment cap for direct and counter-cyclical payments for a single farmer to \$40,000 and \$65,000 respectively
- Creates a total payment cap for ACRE participants of \$32,000 for direct payments and

\$73,000 for counter-cyclical payments

**Increases government efficiency and reduces waste**

- Suspends payments for farms with an aggregate base of 10 acres or fewer (except for socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers)
- This provision eliminates payments in situations where the amount paid is less than the cost of printing the check

**Conservation Programs**

**Increases total spending on conservation programs by \$7.7 billion**

**Extends the Popular Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

- Authorizes 32 million acres to be enrolled in the program from 2010-2012
- Includes a new provision to allow retired landowners participating in CRP to modify their contracts if the land is being transferred to a beginning, limited resource, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher. This would allow eligible producers to return some of this land to grazing or crop production

**Extends the Conservation Security Program (CSP)**

- Provides \$1.1 billion in new funding to enroll nearly 13 million acres per year
- Expands eligible lands to include private forests
- Restructures the program to provide conservation stewardship payments that encourage producers to implement additional conservation practices
- Emphasizes attainment of new conservation benefits

### **Strengthens the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

- Increases funding for EQIP by \$3.3 billion.
- Improves the evaluation process for applications
- Establishes the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) to help producers achieve water quality goals and address water quantity concerns

### **Extends and Increases Funding for Farm Protection Program (FPP)**

- Doubles funding for FPP to \$773 million and establishes a more user-friendly certification process that will determine eligibility for program funds
- Reduces pressure for development on farmland

### **Creates an Open Fields Program to provide incentives to state governments to provide public access to private land for hunting and fishing**

- Provides \$50 million in funding for 2009 through 2012
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### **Improves cooperation between USDA and outside organizations**

- Creates the Cooperative Conservation Program Initiative (CCPI) to better provide assistance to producers
- Allows State/local governments and producer groups to deliver financial assistance to producers instead of USDA

### **Reauthorizes the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**

- Increases cost-share assistance on long-term agreements and provides technical assistance and cost-share assistance to establish and improve wildlife habitat

### **Nutrition Programs**

**Addresses rising food prices by investing an additional \$10.361 billion in nutrition programs**

**The 2008 Farm Bill supports programs that address the needs of food banks to combat food insecurity**

- Increases funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) by \$1.26 billion. This program provides commodities and other resources to states to help stock food banks
- Includes \$50 million for 2008 to immediately address shortages at food pantries



**Reforms benefit rules to adequately cover food expenses and sustain participants in the Food Stamp Program for the entire month**

- Raises and indexes the minimum standard deduction
- Increases the minimum benefit for food stamp recipients, which is especially important for senior citizens in need
- Indexes asset limits and excludes retirement and education accounts as assets
- Lifts dependent care cap, allowing participants to deduct the full cost of dependent care
- Excludes special combat pay as income

**Ensures that Senior Citizens have ample access to food that is healthy and fresh**

- Extends the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) which helps many low-income elderly individuals in need of additional assistance or who are reluctant to apply for food stamps
- Expands the authority of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program which provides senior citizens with vouchers to buy fresh produce at markets and roadside stands and provides \$20 million in new funding over 10 years

**Promotes the health and well-being of children and low-income families**

- Increases funding by \$1.02 billion for the USDA Snack Program, which helps schools provide healthy snacks to students during after-school activities and expands the program to all 50 states
- Creates a demonstration project that will evaluate strategies to address obesity among low-income communities
- Provides \$5 million per year for Community Food Projects for grants to innovative community projects

**Increases cooperation between farmers and organizations in urban areas**

- Establishes the Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center and provides \$3

million to help bring fresh foods into urban food deserts

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*Congressman* *Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23)* serves as a Member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee and the Veterans Affairs Committee. For more information about Rodriguez, see his website at <http://rodriguez.house.gov/> or contact his Press Secretary Josh Rosenblum at [Joshua.rosenblum@mail.house.gov](mailto:Joshua.rosenblum@mail.house.gov)